

United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

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In Reply To:
1610/6840 (923) P

January 7, 2005

EMAIL TRANSMISSION – 01/10/05
Instruction Memorandum No. MT-2005-018
Expires: 9/30/06

To: State Management Team
Attention: Natural Resources Staff, Planning and Environmental Coordinators

From: State Director

Subject: National Sage-grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy
DD: 1/11/05;
1/27/05

Program Areas: Multiple programs.

Purpose: To update Field Offices on issuance of the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM's) National Sage-grouse Habitat Conservation Strategy (National Sage-grouse Strategy) and provide guidance on required action items.

Policy/Action: The BLM State Directors and associated Field Offices have been directed to immediately implement the National Sage-grouse Strategy and actions described in WO IM 2005-024, dated November 16, 2004, previously sent to all field offices.

The intent of the National Strategy is to guide BLM Field Offices until state- and local-level sage-grouse conservation strategies are completed and incorporated into BLM's land use plans. Montana BLM is a signatory to the Management Plan and Conservation Strategies for Sage-grouse in Montana (MT Conservation Strategy—available online at http://fwp.state.mt.us/publicnotices/notice_580.aspx) completed in August 2004. Therefore, Montana Field Offices should focus on adapting appropriate conservation measures from each of these sources (the Montana Conservation Strategy and the National Conservation Strategy) to their local area when completing Land Use Plans (LUPs) and considering actions related to sage-grouse in Montana.

In order to accomplish the bureauwide tasks identified in the National Strategy, the BLM MT/DAKs must complete a number of specific tasks with short-term deadlines.

Short-term deadlines (0-6 months):

- *By January 27, 2005: Complete the review of all LUPs:* Field Offices should use the attached review template to determine whether their land use plans and programs need to be updated. Although there may be challenges due to short time frames, interdisciplinary team involvement may be necessary to complete this review, and coordination with state wildlife agencies is encouraged. Plans currently in revision may need to include information for both the old and revised plan as part of this review.

Each field office should designate a contact to coordinate this review. A conference call has been scheduled for all designated contacts and zoned or acting planning and environmental coordinators on **Tuesday, January 11, 2005**, at 3 p.m. (phone number: 406-896-5345, passcode 7422). Questions on the review template, items that the state office can assist with, and additional information resources for completing this review will all be discussed on the conference call. Pertinent information provided for a previous data call will be re-sent to field offices in advance of the call.

- *By April 2005: Develop a process and schedule for updating land use plans:* Based on the LUP review and level of threats to sage-grouse, the Montana State Office will lead and coordinate development of the process and schedule to update any deficient land use plans to adequately address sage-grouse and sagebrush conservation needs. The process may include both immediate steps to determine whether any revisions to the 10-year planning schedule are necessary, as well as assessing the need for a potential sage-grouse interdisciplinary team.
- *Submit annual reports starting September 1, 2005:* The WO is working on a report format to facilitate these annual submissions, which will summarize actions to implement the strategy, and most importantly, actions to improve sage-grouse habitat and/or populations.

Ongoing tasks (Starting now and continuing indefinitely):

- *Field Offices undertaking plan revisions* will follow the *Guidance for Addressing Sagebrush Habitat Conservation in Land Use Plans* (action item 1.3.1 in the National Sage-grouse Strategy). While the guidance is primarily focused on planning areas with existing sage-grouse habitat, planning areas with historic sage-grouse habitat should also consider the ability to include goals, objectives, allowable uses, and management actions that would allow restoration treatments to go forward.

Consistent with our commitment to the MT Conservation Strategy, goals, objectives, and priority habitats for sage-grouse will be included in at least one alternative during land use plan revision in Montana planning areas with sage-grouse habitat present.

- *All offices with sage-grouse habitat* will also consider guidance for the management of sagebrush plant communities for sage-grouse conservation as they plan and implement projects. *Guidance for the Management of Sagebrush Plant Communities for Sage-grouse Conservation* (item 1.4.1 in the National Sage-grouse Strategy), section 6, provides Suggested Management Practices (SMPs) to be used as project design features or mitigation measures. Field Offices should also continue working with partners to refine population and habitat data and resolve any data deficiencies. A map developed by the state of Montana (Schroder 2000 and 2004) serves as a base to work from, but new data should be tracked as well.

Participate in collaborative discussions and dialogue with the local WAFWA working groups and other partners to develop objectives, management actions, and mitigation specific to the high priority planning area(s) in your state(s). Include the best available science (e.g., Miller and Eddleman, Connelly guidelines, Birds of the Sagebrush Sea, etc.), Best Management Practices, locally available data, and other guidelines and information appropriate to sage-grouse and its habitat.

Montana Field Offices should also consider the MT Conservation Strategy conservation actions and guidelines in the decision-making process, adapted as appropriate for local application. This includes the commitment to consider objectives for sage-grouse habitats and relevant information

about sage-grouse seasonal habitat needs when determining desired resource condition; and to review and consider applicable conservation actions or guidelines through the interdisciplinary process when making decisions involving specific sage-grouse issues.

Background: The BLM manages more sage-grouse habitat than any other entity and, as a result, has a key role in the conservation of the species and its habitat. Approximately half of all remaining sage-grouse habitat is under BLM administration. It is critical we continue with our ongoing conservation efforts. The BLM must also continue to implement new actions to reduce the risk to sage-grouse populations and to conserve sage-grouse habitat. One of BLM's highest priorities is to implement the National Sage-grouse Strategy on BLM-managed lands and related conservation actions in a consistent and effective manner. All State Directors and Field Managers will note their areas of responsibility in the National Sage-grouse Strategy and take appropriate actions to ensure immediate implementation.

National Sage-grouse Strategy: The National Sage-grouse Strategy is the framework to address the conservation of sage-grouse and risk to sagebrush habitats on lands and activities administered by the BLM. It outlines national level vision, goals, and expectations for how work is to be completed, identifies resources and actions to be considered at the local level, and provides potential methods for addressing risks to sage grouse.

The following four goals guide BLM's implementation of the National Sage-grouse Strategy:

- 1) improve the effectiveness of the management framework for addressing conservation needs of sage-grouse on lands administered by the BLM;
- 2) increase knowledge and understanding of resource conditions and priorities for habitat maintenance and restoration;
- 3) expand partnerships, available research, and information that support effective management of sage-grouse habitat, and;
- 4) ensure leadership and resources are adequate to implement national and state- level sage-grouse habitat conservation strategies and/or plans.

The National Strategy includes the following two action items related to land use planning and managing the sagebrush plant community for sage-grouse conservation:

Guidance for Addressing Sagebrush Habitat Conservation in Land Use Plans (National Strategy Attachment 1: Action 1.3.1 under the National Sage-grouse Strategy):

- Mandatory guidance for BLM planning teams in areas with sage-grouse habitat
- Applies to land use planning efforts in progress (to the fullest extent practicable), new planning starts, and plan amendments.
- May be supplemented with information from more local completed strategies.

Guidance for the Management of Sagebrush Plant Communities for Sage-grouse Conservation (National Strategy Attachment 2: Action 1.4.1 under the National Sage-grouse Strategy):

- Provides guidance for managing, restoring and enhancing sagebrush habitat on BLM-administered public lands, and applies until the Bureau and its partners (1) finalize and adopt the BLM State Office level strategies and/or state wildlife agency-led sage-grouse conservation plans; and/or (2) incorporate specific sage-grouse habitat objectives and conservation measures into BLM planning documents.
- Includes sagebrush conservation management practices (Best Management Practices and Suggested Management Practices) for sage-grouse and other sagebrush-dependent wildlife species on BLM-administered lands.

- May be modified through a collaborative process to fit local and regional conditions and to reflect ongoing efforts to complete state-level strategies.

Time Frame: This IM is in effect upon issuance.

Coordination:

Contact: Katie Baltrusch, Montana State Office, 406-896-5246, or Roxanne Falise, Montana State Office, 406-896-5025.

Signed by: Martin C. Ott, State Director

Authenticated by: Kathy Iszler, Staff Assistant (MT-924)

1 Attachment

1-Draft LUP Review Template (5 pp)

Distribution

Assistant FM, Havre – 1

Assistant FM, Glasgow – 1

**Bureau of Land Management
Land Use Plan Review Template
for
Greater Sage-grouse
December 2004**

Purpose: This Land Use Plan review template offers a consistent approach to review and document land use allocations, land health condition objectives, and mitigation for all program activities (per IM 2005-024, Action 1) to determine the adequacy in addressing threats to sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats.

Guidance:

1. An interdisciplinary team (state or local) will use information gathered in the review to make a YES/NO adequacy determination for each existing land use plan. If a new Draft RMP is underway, field offices are encouraged to apply the review to the draft document. The adequacy of the planning documents to address sage-grouse threats should be based on several factors, such as the amount of sage-grouse habitat in the planning area, demands on the resources, allocations that conflict with sage-grouse conservation or others factors as appropriate. **By February 1, 2005, each state(s) must submit a report to the Director outlining which BLM plans and programs need updating and which plans are adequate.**
2. By April 1, 2005, reviews will be compiled at the state level and used as the basis for developing state strategies for updating plans to adequately address threats to sage-grouse. These strategies will be incorporated into the BLM 10-year planning schedule by the end of April 2005.

Instructions for answering review questions:

1. Land Use Plans are viewed as a “regulatory mechanism” when the US Fish and Wildlife Service evaluates threats to a species under the Endangered Species Act. For that reason, the questions pertain to the written management direction in a BLM Land Use Plan (LUP), Resource Management Plan (RMP), an amendment to the Plan, or Management Framework Plan (MFP). If policies or conservation strategies exist, but have not been incorporated through amendment, plan revision or plan maintenance, they should not be used to answer the questions.
2. Please answer all the questions. Write N/A if it does not apply.
3. For each question where you answer “yes”, disclose the page numbers of the plan from which you based your answer.

4. Direction, guidance or constraints that demonstrate intent to manage or maintain sagebrush habitat compatibly with sage-grouse habitat requirements are required to achieve a “yes” response. Broad statements such as “Special status species conservation will be applied on a project by project basis” are too general to serve as assurances that BLM is addressing threats to sage-grouse by managing or maintaining sage-grouse and sagebrush habitat.
5. Questions apply to areas “within currently occupied sage-grouse habitat” unless otherwise noted. Currently occupied habitat should be based on Schroeder et. al 2000, 2004, or other more specific habitat maps developed by state wildlife agencies and partners.
6. Comments requested in the last column should briefly note how the Plan direction, guidance or constraints address threats to sage-grouse, either directly or indirectly.

General Information

1. Land Use Planning Area _____
2. Date of your current land use planning document _____
3. Name and dates of all amendments _____
3. Scheduled date for revision or amending _____
4. Name of person(s) completing questionnaire _____
6. Does your planning area have occupied sage-grouse habitat? ____ yes; ____ no
 - a. If no, do you have unoccupied habitat that is fragmented or degraded to a condition not currently suitable, but could potentially be restored to suitable sage-grouse habitat within the next 25 years?
____ yes; ____ no

If your response is “no” to #6 and 6a, your review is complete; otherwise, continue.

Question	YES	NO	N/A	Page numbers or Comment
Focus: General Land Use Plan decisions to emphasize sage-grouse or sagebrush				
7. Does your LUP identify sage-grouse as a priority species, or sagebrush as a priority habitat?				
8. Does your plan include specific decisions (goals, objectives, allowable uses, and management actions) for sage-grouse?				
9. Does your plan include decisions specific to sage-grouse or sagebrush habitat restoration and maintenance?				
10. Is sage-grouse a designated sensitive species in your state?				
10a. If yes, does your plan include specific decisions for special status species habitat management?				
Focus: Habitat loss through degradation or permanent conversion to non-natives				
11. Does your plan have direction, guidance or constraints that protect sage-grouse habitat occurring in tracts included in designated land tenure disposal zones?				
12. Does your plan provide direction, guidance or constraints that discourage or prevent habitat loss caused by conversion of sagebrush to non-native grassland types through chemical, mechanical or emergency rehabilitation treatments?				
13. Does your plan provide direction, guidance or constraints that prevent or discourage sagebrush manipulations that would alter the structure and composition of the vegetation community to the degree that it is no longer suitable for sage-grouse?				

Question	YES	NO	N/A	Page numbers or Comment
14. Does your plan provide direction, guidance, constraints or mitigation to prevent or minimize habitat loss or degradation associated with human-caused effects from the following program areas?				
Fluid minerals:				
Coal:				
Saleable minerals:				
Non-energy Leasables:				
Recreation (access management):				
Locatable minerals:				
Recreation (special use permits);				
Land and realty (rights of way):				
15. Does your plan include direction, guidance, constraints or land health and condition objectives to prevent sage-grouse habitat loss or degradation by livestock management?				
17. Does your plan include direction, guidance, constraints or land health and condition objectives to prevent sage-grouse habitat loss or degradation by excessive wild horse and burro use?				
18. Does your plan include direction, guidance, constraints or land health and condition objectives to prevent sage-grouse habitat loss or degradation by excessive wildlife use?				
19. Does your plan provide direction, guidance or constraints to prevent or minimize habitat loss by wildfire or prescribed fire activities?				
20. Does your plan provide direction, guidance or constraints to prevent or discourage habitat loss by non-native or invasive species?				

Question	YES	NO	N/A	Page numbers or Comment
Focus: Increased sage-grouse mortality caused by fragmentation of quality habitats				
21. Does your plan provide direction, guidance or constraints for preventing or minimizing habitat fragmentation that may be a direct cause of mortality for individual sage-grouse (e.g. roads, powerlines, fences, facilities etc.) or result in poor quality sagebrush habitat that negatively affects sage-grouse vitality rates? Respond for each of the following program areas.				
Recreation (access management):				
Lands and realty (rights of ways):				
Fluid minerals:				
Grazing:				
Monitoring				
21. Does your plan contain any direction or guidance for monitoring the following?				
Quality or quantity of sagebrush in sage-grouse habitat:				
Effectiveness of best management practices or mitigation:				
Implementation of conservation actions:				

Additional comments regarding land use plan allowable uses and management actions that may pose impediments to implementing the conservation actions for sage-grouse and their habitats: